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COMICS PRESENTS:

"the DARK"



story

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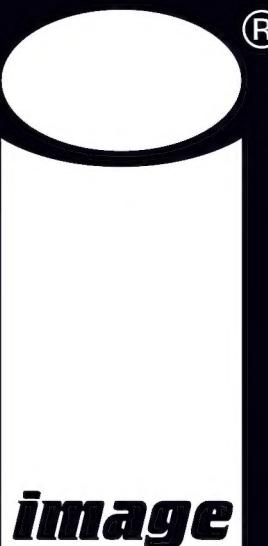
STEVE OLIFF
and OLYOPTICS

Dedicated to:
DAVE SIM

FOR IMAGE COMICS
LARRY MARDER - exec. director **TONY LOBITO** - publisher

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Evil.

IT'S NOT A GOAL THAT PEOPLE CONSCIOUSLY SET FOR THEMSELVES, YET MILLIONS... **BILLIONS...** HAVE BEEN EMBRACED BY ITS SEDUCTIVE COILS.

IT CAN HIDE BEHIND A VARIETY OF GUISES:

POWER.
DESIRE.
COMPETITION.
JUSTIFICATION.
SELF-INTEREST.



THOUGH MOST PROFESS THEIR INNOCENCE, EACH OF US HAS FACED IT IN OUR LIVES... EACH OF US HAS TOUCHED IT, HOWEVER BRIEFLY. THE BIBLE CALLS IT SIN, AND HAS IDENTIFIED ITS ROOT:

THE LOVE OF MONEY.

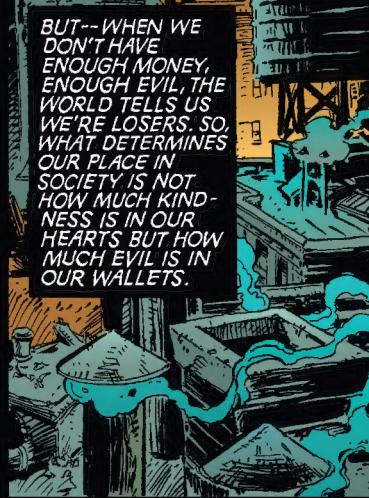
IF THE THOUGHT OF AN HONEST WAGE TO COVER HONEST EXPENSES SEEMS LIKE A SIGN OF STUNTED GROWTH... IF IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE THE PROFIT COMES FROM, OR WHERE IT GOES... WATCH OUT!



TRADE AND BARTER ARE REAL. CASH CAN BE USED FOR ANY THING OR ACTIVITY: IT'S AN ABSTRACT. MONEY COMES FROM NOWHERE AND PROMISES EVERYTHING.



IF YOUR MOTIVES AREN'T CLEAN, MONEY ITSELF BECOMES EVIL.



BUT--WHEN WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, ENOUGH EVIL, THE WORLD TELLS US WE'RE LOSERS. SO WHAT DETERMINES OUR PLACE IN SOCIETY IS NOT HOW MUCH KINDNESS IS IN OUR HEARTS BUT HOW MUCH EVIL IS IN OUR WALLETS.

TYPICALLY, WE DISTILL EFFORT INTO VALUE IN TWO-WEEK BATCHES.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO IT. WE NEED IT. WE CALL IT PAYDAY.

A LACK OF THIS EVIL CAN COST US DEARLY.



WHAT?!
THEY CAN'T DO THAT,
NO WAY! YOU STOP THEM! YOU GET MY LITTLE GIRL BACK!

YOU STOP THEM! YOU GET MY LITTLE GIRL BACK!

I'M SORRY, MR. BARNETT, BUT THE JUDGE'S DECISION HAS ALREADY BEEN HANDED DOWN.

I DID EVERYTHING I COULD. UNFORTUNATELY, THE LAW ALLOWS US NO FURTHER APPEALS.

DON'T HAND ME THAT **BULL!** YOU'RE A LAWYER, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO **HELP** ME!

WHAT AM I PAYING YOU FOR?!

ACTUALLY YOU'RE NOT, MR. BARNETT. I'M A PUBLIC DEFENDER. MY BILL ISN'T YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

AS FOR YOUR DAUGHTER, I KNOW THERE'S NOTHING I CAN SAY THAT WILL MAKE THIS ANY EASIER, **BUT** THE JUDGE FEELS SHE'LL BE BETTER OFF WITH FOSTER PARENTS AS PROVIDERS.

I'M NOT SAYING IT'S FAIR...

FAIR?
FAIR!!

YOU ASK KATIE ABOUT FAIR! SHE WANTS TO STAY WITH ME. SHE WON'T GO!

SWEET JESUS.

WHAT KIND OF COUNTRY SENDS A CHILD FROM HER DAD.

SHE DOESN'T HAVE A CHOICE. NONE OF US DO. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW AT TEN.

CLICK!



NEW YORK STATE COURTHOUSE, STATEN ISLAND: THE NEXT DAY.

WOULD YOU CARE TO SAY ANYTHING BEFORE I GIVE MY RULING, MR. BARNETT?

PLEASE, YOUR HONOR, KATIE'S ALL I GOT. YOU CAN'T TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME. SHE'S ONLY FOURTEEN BUT SHE KNOWS SO MUCH, THIS WHOLE THING IS TEARING HER TO PIECES.

SHE DESERVES BETTER THAN ALL THIS.

I WOULD AGREE, MR. BURNETT.

I HAVE CONSIDERED THE FACT THAT KATE VALUES YOU AS HER FATHER, AND HER STATED WISH TO REMAIN A PART OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD.

THIS DECISION HAS BEEN ONE OF THE TOUGHEST OF MY CAREER.

THAT IS WHY, AFTER A VERY LONG AND DIFFICULT DELIBERATION, I'VE DECIDED TO REMOVE HER FROM YOUR CARE AND PUT HER IN A NEW SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES. THIS, I BELIEVE, IS FOR HER OWN GOOD.

SINCE THE DEATH OF YOUR WIFE FIFTEEN MONTHS AGO, THE STATE HAS BEEN REVIEWING YOUR FILES. AT THE TIME OF KATE'S ADOPTION IN 1982, YOU AND YOUR WIFE WERE ABLE TO PROVIDE A STABLE, SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE UNTIMELY LOSS OF YOUR WIFE HAS REMOVED THE MOTHER FIGURE FROM THE CHILD'S LIFE. ADD TO THAT YOUR STEADY LACK OF EMPLOYMENT FOR OVER ELEVEN MONTHS AND YOUR CURRENT LIVING CONDITIONS. I FEEL I HAVE **NO CHOICE** BUT TO PLACE HER WITH FOSTER PARENTS WHO MIGHT BETTER PROVIDE FOR HER FUTURE.

IF IN THE COMING YEARS YOU CAN SHOW THIS COURT A LIVING SITUATION CONDUSIVE TO A YOUNG TEENAGER'S NEEDS, AN AUXILIARY APPEAL MAY BE FILED.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

HE UNDERSTANDS, ALL RIGHT. TWELVE YEARS OF LOVE, CARING AND TENDERNESS MEAN **NOTHING** IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO PAY FOR A COLLEGE EDUCATION.

FRED BARNETT DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY. ENOUGH EVIL.



SOMEWHERE IN TIME:

IHE DANCING FLAMES IN HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL ARE LACED WITH THE SCENT OF BILE AND OTHER ORGANIC MATTER. OVERSEEING THE UNIMAGINABLE AREA, ITS SELF-IMPOSED RULER DOMINATES ALL. HE IS THE **MALEBOLGIA**, A DEVIL, ONE OF MANY WHO OCCUPY THE MYRIAD LAYERS WHICH COMPRIZE THIS PLACE.

HIS ULTIMATE GOAL: THE BUILDING OF ARMIES, CONSISTING OF LOST SOULS FROM THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS. THEY WILL EVENTUALLY CARRY HIS STANDARD AGAINST HEAVEN, AT **ARMAGEDDON**.

AT THE FORE WILL BE HIS OFFICERS. THESE MOST EXCELLENT OF THE DAMNED, SINGLED OUT FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS IN COMBAT, WILL DRILL THEIR NIGHTMARISH TACTICS INTO THE TROOPS AT THEIR DISPOSAL.

JHESE ARE HIS ELITE. THESE ARE HIS **HELL-SPAWN**.

EACH HAS A SPECIFIC DESTINY TO FULFILL, THOUGH NONE REALIZED IT AT THE TIME OF THEIR "RECRUITMENT."

JIS ONE SUCH SPAWN WHO IS NOW UNDER THE **MALEBOLGIA**'S WATCHFUL EYE: THE OFFICER-IN-TRAINING WHO'S NATIVE TO THE EARTH... THE ONE FORMERLY CALLED **LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS**.

"COME, MY PETS, LET ME AMUSE YOU WITH ANOTHER TALE," Hisses the **MALEBOLGIA**. HE LEANS FORWARD, CHIN RESTING COOLY ON HIS HAND. HE CONTINUES, "THOUGH THEY ALL RESIST, THE HELL-SPAWN HAVE **ALWAYS** BECOME GREAT LEADERS FOR MY ARMY... THOSE THAT SURVIVE THE TRAINING. THERE HAVE BEEN A **FEW** DISAPPOINTMENTS. IT IS THEIR INTERNAL STRUGGLES BACK ON THEIR HOME PLANETS WHICH INTRIGUE ME... THE **HUNT**, IF YOU WILL."

AS HIS CRYPTIC DISSERTATION UNFOLDS, THE INHABITANTS, BOTH RESIDENT AND DAMNED, SHIFT CLOSER. THE **MALEBOLGIA** LEANS BACK AND SMILES.

"LET ME UPDATE YOU ON OUR NEWEST SELECTION... OUR NEWEST **SPAWN**."

GOD.

EVERYTHING'S
SO MESSED UP.

I'M NOT
THINKING
STRAIGHT
ANYMORE.
NOT USING
MY TRAINING
LIKE I SHOULD.

THIS WHOLE THING
IS ABOUT ME
AND WANDA.

I'VE BEEN SO
DAMN DISTRACTED
BY ALL THIS
UNBELIEVABLE
CRAP!

THE MAFIA.

HITMEN.

COPS.

EVEN
THE BOYS
IN THE
ALLEYS.

BUT AT LEAST I'VE
STOPPED HIDING LIKE
SOME COWERING DOG.

NOW THEY
KNOW I EXIST...
AND WHAT I'M
CAPABLE OF.

BALL'S IN
THEIR COURT.

LET'S SEE IF THEY CAN COME UP WITH SOME BETTER ANSWERS ABOUT WHAT I'VE BECOME.

ALL I KNOW IS THAT SINCE I GOT THESE POWERS, I'VE BECOME SOME FRIGGIN' MAGNET FOR EVERYBODY'S ANGER.

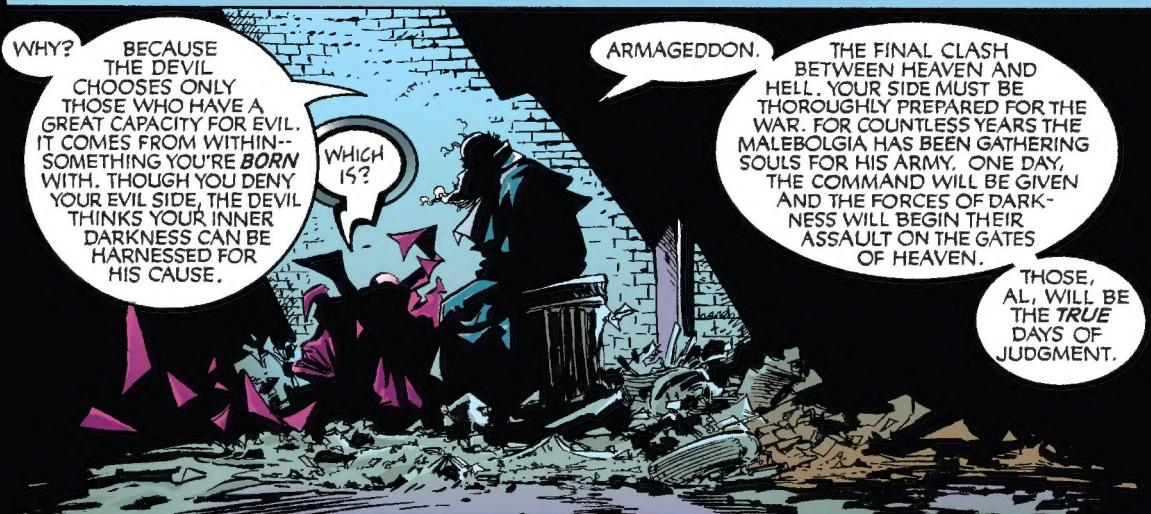
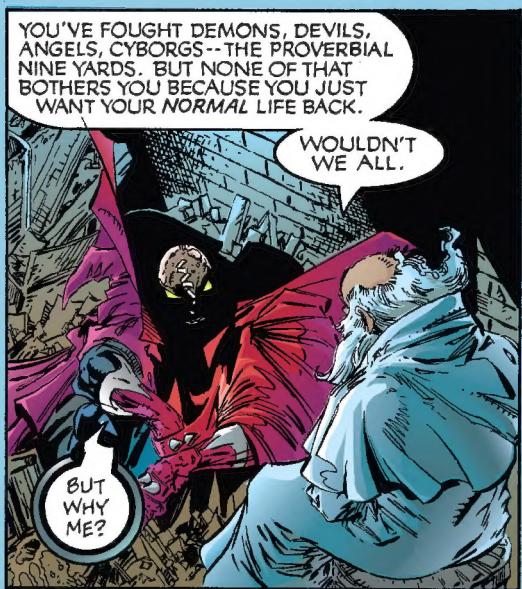
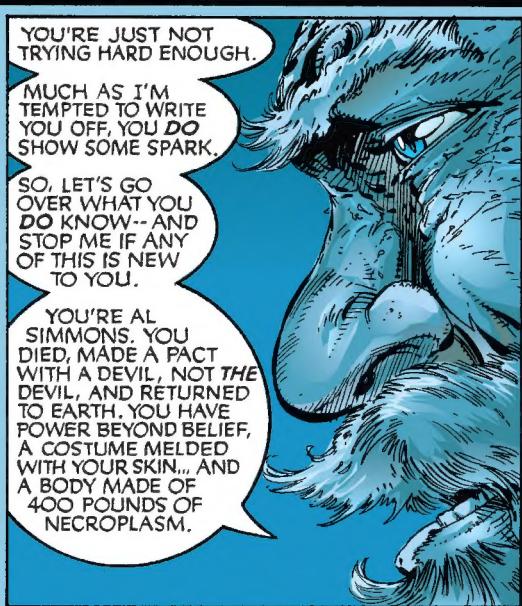
PLUS, I SEEM TO BE USING THE CONFLICTS AS A WAY OF AVOIDING HAVING TO FACE WANDA AGAIN.*

LIKE I'M STALLING.

YOU'RE NOT. YOU'RE ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE--THOUGH YOU AREN'T AWARE OF THAT.

WHO--?!

* NOT SINCE ISSUE THREE
-- Tom





J

HE MONOLOGUE CONTINUES.

"THOUGH MY HELL-SPAWN ARE PERMANENTLY ENSNARED, THEY CONTINUE TO TEST THE BOUNDRIES OF THEIR CAGE," Hisses THE BLOATED TYRANT. "THEY WILL SCURRY AROUND, AT FIRST Hoping, DREAMING THAT THERE IS A WAY OUT... BUT THERE IS NONE. THEY HAVE TWO CHOICES ONLY: ACQUIRE THE TROOPS AND INSPIRE THE LOYALTY AFFORDED A FIRST-RATE OFFICER, OR PERISH... AND THEN ANSWER ETERNALLY FOR FRUSTRATING ME IN THE PURSUIT OF MY GOALS.

"LET'S SEE HOW OUR DEAR AL SIMMONS DEALS WITH HIS SITUATION."

S

LEANING BACKWARDS, THE MALEBOLGIA PUSHES HIS FEET FURTHER INTO THE SEARING FLAMES. NEARER CLIMB THE LESSER SPAWN, ANXIOUS TO LEARN WHY IT WAS SIMMONS PICKED FROM AMONG THE MULTITUDE OF DESERVING DAMNED.

"AH, I SEE THAT YOU TOO ARE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS," CACKLES THE MALEBOLGIA. "HOW IRONIC THAT AS SIMMONS TORTURES HIMSELF, CASTING ABOUT FOR ANSWERS, YOU, HIS FUTURE TROOPS, ARE CURIOUS ABOUT THOSE SAME QUESTIONS.

"WHY HIM? WHY AL SIMMONS?"

A

SMILE CROSSES HIS CRACKED LIPS. THE STORY-TELLER RELISHES THE ADORATION OF THE RAPT, IF CAPTIVE, AUDIENCE.

"LET ME TELL YOU WHAT MAKES A TRUE HELL-SPAWN."

SO I'M JUST
A PUPPET. THAT'S
ENCOURAGING.

THINGS WERE
SO SIMPLE WHEN I
WAS ALIVE. I FOLLOWED
ORDERS. KILLED WHO
THE GOVERNMENT TOLD
ME, AND COLLECTED A
STEADY PAYCHECK.

BUT NOW
THIS!

I DON'T HAVE A
HOME OR A WIFE
TO GO BACK TO, AND
ALL I SEEM TO DO
IS FIGHT SOMEONE
ELSE'S BATTLES.

AIN'T THAT
THE TRUTH. TELL
ME SOMETHING,
COUNT, WHY PUT
ME IN THE FUTURE.
FIVE YEARS. WHAT'S
THE POINT?

NO ONE
SAID BEING
DEAD WAS
GOING TO
BE EASY,
AL.

A
TEST. ONE OF
MANY YOU
MUST PASS TO
FULFILL YOUR DESTINY.
THE DEVILS, BY NATURE,
ARE TRICKSTERS. THEY
THRIVE ON BENDING
THE RULES OF EVERY
GAME THEY PLAY.

YOU WANTED
BACK TO EARTH. HE
GAVE YOU THAT.

UNFORTUNATELY, HAVING
NEVER BEEN DEAD BEFORE,
YOU WEREN'T AWARE OF
YOUR RIGHTS. SINCE YOU
DIDN'T SPECIFY ANY CONDI-
TIONS WITH YOUR REQUEST,
THE MALEBOLGIA
GRANTED YOU THE
TIME TO SEE YOUR
WIFE. THAT'S
ALL.

HE GAVE
YOU ONE THING.
EVERYTHING ELSE
WAS HIS TO
DETERMINE. A PRETTY
SOUR TRADE,
I'D SAY.

BUT DON'T
FEEL BAD.
THERE'VE BEEN
PLENTY OF
OTHERS.



YOU'RE
NOT THE
ONLY ONE
THAT
SUFFERS.



HEY AL! *Al!*
GOT A MINUTE?
I NEED YOU TA
MEET A FRIEND.

I TOLD
HIM YOU COULD
HELP. Y'KNOW, DO
SOME OF YOUR
MAGIC.



WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?



I KNOW WE'VE NEVER
MET FORMALLY, BUT I LIVE
AROUND HERE TOO... SEEN ALL
THE CRAZY STUFF THAT'S BEEN
HAPPENING. WELL ANYWAYS, THIS
HERE IS **FRED BARNETT**, AN OLD
PAL FROM 'WAY BACK. HE'S GOT
A BIT OF A PROBLEM.
DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

SO I TOLD HIM
YOU COULD POSSIBLY
HELP. GIVE HIM THE
SCOOP, FREDDY.

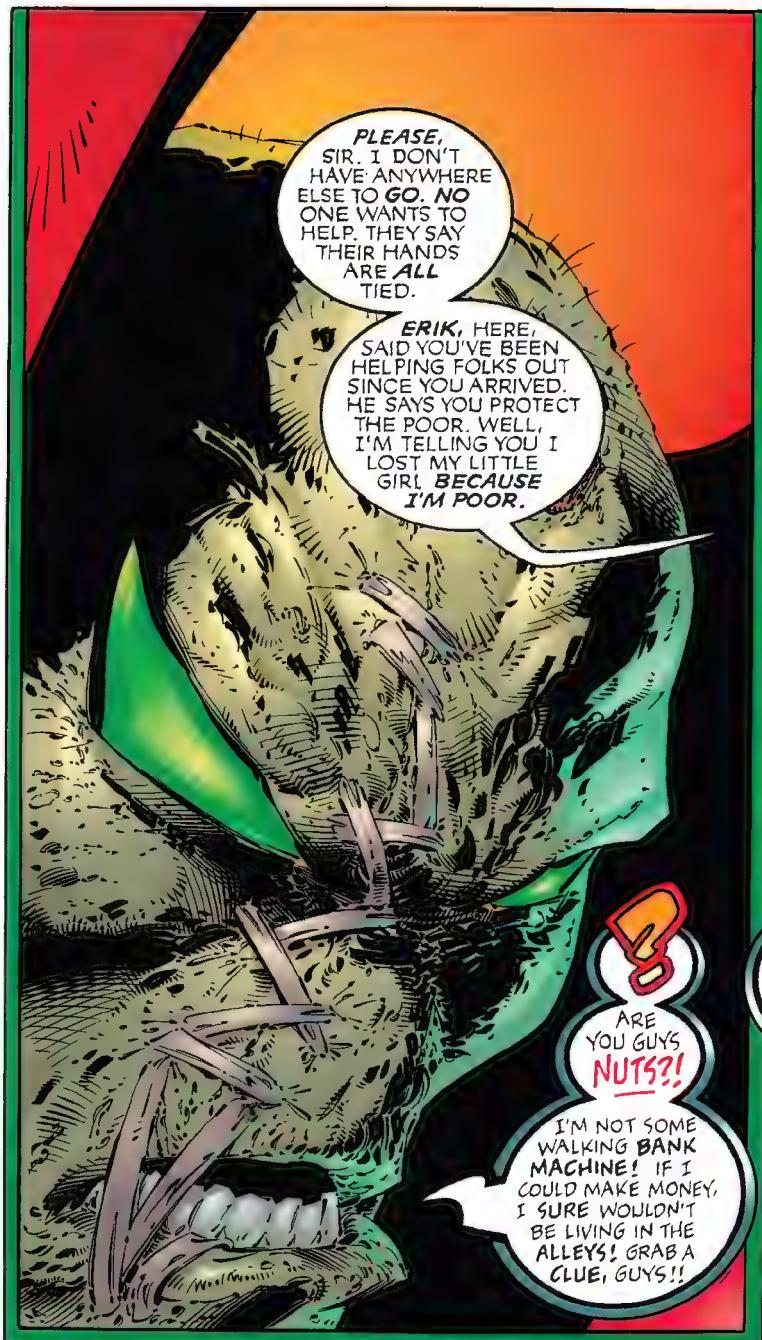
'EVENING,
SIR.



YESTERDAY
THE COURTS TOOK
MY DAUGHTER AWAY
FROM ME. AFTER TWELVE
YEARS THEY JUST TOOK MY
BABY FROM ME. THEY
SAY I'M NOT FIT TO
BE A PARENT ANY
LONGER.

AND
IT'S ALL
BECAUSE OF
MONEY.

THE JUDGE
SAYS I'VE GOT
TO PROVIDE
BETTER. GIVE
HER MORE THINGS.
THEN I CAN HAVE
MY LITTLE KATIE
BACK.





"POWER!" SCREECHES THE MALEBOLGIA. "IT BOTH MOTIVATES AND ENABLES THE TRULY CHOSEN. THE SPAWN IS BEING HUNTED BY EVERY AGENCY IMAGINABLE, AND THE ONLY THING THAT CAN *SAVE* HIM IS HIS INFERNALLY-INSPIRED **POWER!**"

"I TRANSFORM THE RECRUITS INTO CREATURES OF MAGIC. EVENTUALLY THEY LEARN THAT THEIR INNER POOL OF ENERGY WILL ONE DAY BE DRAINED. IT IS *THEN* THAT THE TRAINING BEGINS IN EARNEST."

"THEIR **REBIRTH** PLACES THEM AT A FOUR-WAY CROSSROAD.

"THEY CAN DO **NOTHING**... LOCK THEMSELVES AWAY FROM THEIR SURROUNDINGS... WHICH TURNS THEIR HEARTS COLD. IN TIME, VERY GRADUALLY, THEIR ENERGIES ARE SPENT ANYWAY."

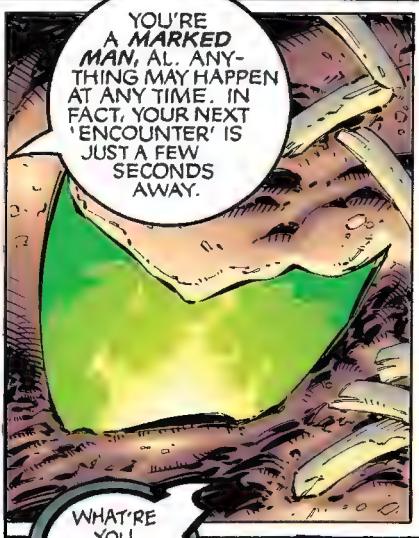
"THEY CAN CONVINCE THEMSELVES THEY'RE **HEROIC**, WHILE UNWITTINGLY ACTING ON THE IMPULSES WHICH DAMNED THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY WILL SINGLE OUT AND PUNISH THE EVIL ONES AROUND THEM... EVIL SOULS WHICH THEN ARE **MINE**."

"THEY MAY CHOOSE THE PATH OF **DARKNESS**, AGGRESSIVELY DISPATCHING THOSE MOST VENAL AND VICIOUS, WHO'VE **EARNT** THEIR PLACE HERE."

"OR THEY MAY **DESPAIR**, AND PERISH THROUGH CARELESSNESS OR DESIGN."

"IN ANY CASE, THE SPAWN WILL RETURN TO ME, EITHER AS VALUED **OFFICERS**... OR AS A SOURCE OF **NOURISHMENT** FOR MY HUNGRY ARMIES!"

 **HE** SUB-OVERLORD CASTS A SPASTIC ARM FORWARD. IT'S A GESTURE OF TRIUMPH.





MR. SIMMONS, MIGHT WE TALK?

WHY...?!
JESUS, LADY!



CALL ME GABRIELLE, MR. SIMMONS. IF I MIGHT HAVE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME, I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU.

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TALK.

OH, YES YOU DO THOUGH IT MAY NOT APPEAR THAT WAY.

Huh?

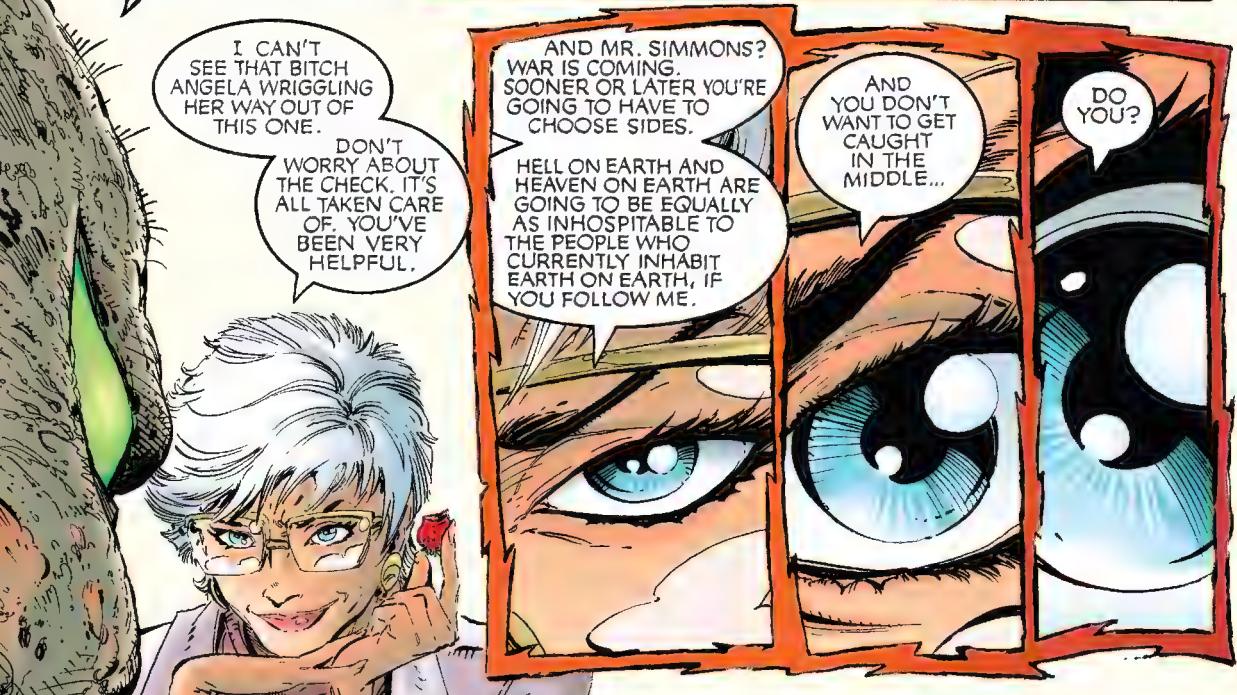
NOTHING CAN HARM US IN HERE, AND WE'RE NOW OUTSIDE OF TIME AS IT'S USUALLY PERCEIVED.

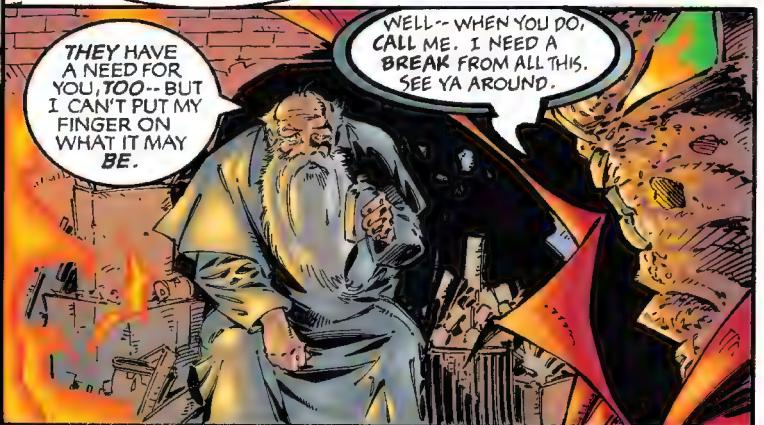
THIS, MY LIFE, EVERYTHING'S SO SCREWED UP.

WINE? THEY HAVE A FINE CHILLED CHABLIS I CAN PERSONALLY RECOMMEND.

NONSENSE, BUT SIT DOWN, SIT DOWN, YOU'RE MAKING ME NERVOUS.









YES!!

"YES!

"EVEN **HEAVEN** IS OUT TO GET OUR SIMMONS-SPAWN! NOW HE IS **COMPLETELY** DIS-ORIENTED, GROPING FOR ANSWERS. GOOD. BAD. UP. DOWN. HE DOESN'T KNOW WHICH WAY TO TURN! HAHAHA!!

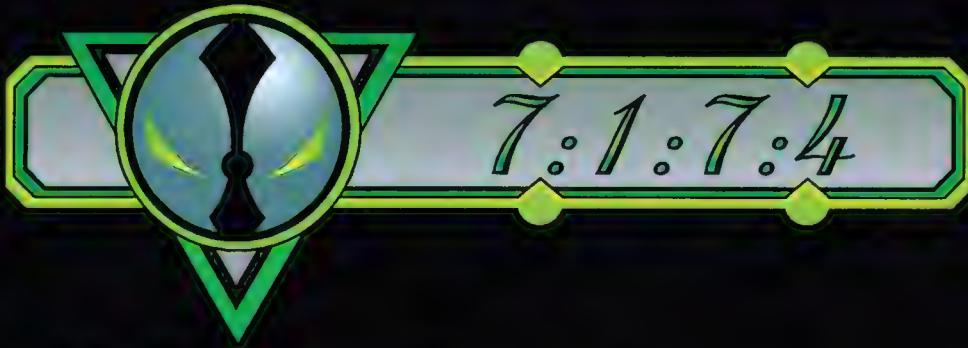
LIKE A BAD COMEDIAN, THE MALEBOLGIA LAUGHS AT HIS OWN RHETORIC. TENSING UNEXPECTEDLY, HE SQUISHES THE UNLUCKY LISTENER PERCHED IN HIS CALLOUSED HAND.

"SOON, VERY SOON, HE WILL FIND HIS ANSWER. WHEN HE DOES, IT WILL CONSUME HIM, AS IT HAS THE OTHERS BEFORE HIM.

Power!

"IT'S YOUR CALLING... IT'S IN YOUR BLOOD!"

"HOW I DO ENJOY THIS GAME!"



THE GAME WILL HAVE AN END... BUT ITS LENGTH WILL DEPEND UPON THE CREATIVITY OF ITS PLAYERS.

TWO NIGHTS LATER...



VIOLATOR #3 -- Tom





HA HA HA HA
HEE HEE HO HO HAA

SOMEWHERE IN TIME.

HA HA HA HA HA HA
HEE HEE HEEE

JENS OF MILLIONS OF
TWISTED SOULS HOWL
WITH LAUGHTER.

HA HA HA
HAW HEH HEH
HAW HAW HO HO HO
HEE HEE

LOUDEST AMONG THEM IS
THEIR STORYTELLER. IT
WILL BE SOME CONSIDER-
ABLE TIME BEFORE THE
MANIACAL SOUNDS DIE
DOWN.



LOST IN THE MOST
OBSCURE SHADOWS
OF A DECAYING CITY
WALKS A DEAD MAN.

TONIGHT, FOR THE
FIRST TIME SINCE HIS
RETURN, HE FEELS
DEAD.

NEXT ISSUE:
THE **CURSE**





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE

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